10 Institutions I: The Family, Economy, and Education

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Chapter Outline

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Understand the nature of social institutions and the interrelationships between these structures.

- Be familiar with the basic sociological perspectives on institutions.

- Discuss the institution of the family and related concepts, including marriage, divorce, parenthood, and cohabitation.

- Explain the institution of the economy and its various manifestations.

- Discuss the institution of education, including the importance of tracking, social capital, and disparities of outcomes for various groups.

A 2012 study conducted by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (Carnevale, Cheah, & Strohl, 2012) examined how new college graduates with bachelor's degrees are faring on the job market following the Great Recession. The unemployment rates and median earnings (by major) for recent graduates are shown in Table 10.1. The data used in their analysis were from 2009 and 2010. The subjects were recent graduates with a bachelor's degree (ranging in age from 22 to 26 years).

Some of the major findings of the Georgetown study (Carnevale, Cheah, & Strohl, 2012, pp. 1–20) include:

- The overall unemployment rate for recent college graduates is 8.9%. However, the unemployment rate for recent high school graduates is over two-and-a-half times higher (22.9%), and it is an astounding 31.5% for recent high school drop-outs.
- The major with the highest unemployment rate is architecture (13.9%). This is understandable given the pronounced downturn in the building trades and in real estate following the Great Recession of 2007.
- The unemployment rates for majors linked to stable or growing sectors, such as education and health care (both at 5.4%), tend to be low. However, the median annual salary for recent graduates in health care is $43,000, while for education majors it is only $33,000.
- Psychology and social work have fairly low unemployment rates (7.3%) because the majority of graduates in these majors take jobs in education and health care. However, the median annual salary for these graduates is among the lowest ($30,000).
- Engineering has a below-average unemployment rate (7.5%) and the highest median annual salary of the majors included in the study ($55,000).
- Business graduates have an unemployment rate that is below the norm (7.4%) and a relatively attractive median salary ($39,000).

Table 10.1: Unemployment rates and median earnings for recent college graduates by major

Major area of study	Unemployment rate	Median annual salary
Agriculture & Natural Resources	7.0%	$32,000
Life & Physical Sciences	7.7%	$32,000
Architecture	13.9%	$36,000
Humanities & Liberal Arts	9.4%	$31,000
Communication & Journalism	7.3%	$33,000
Computers & Mathematics	8.2%	$46,000
Education	5.4%	$33,000
Engineering	7.5%	$55,000
Law & Public Policy	8.1%	$34,000
Social Science	8.9%	$37,000
Health	5.4%	$43,000
Psychology & Social Work	7.3%	$30,000
Recreation	8.3%	$30,000
Arts	11.1%	$30,000
Business	7.4%	$39,000

Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, Hard Times, College Majors, Unemployment and Earnings: Not All College Degrees Are Created Equal. Carnevale, A. P., Cheah, B., & Strohl, J. (2012).

Education and the economy are two of the institutions we will be covering in this chapter. The many societal institutions are related to one another. This means that problems and challenges in one institution tend to create problems and challenges in another institution. For instance, as the Georgetown study suggests, recent problems in the economy have created challenges for those entering the employment market. Delays in securing employment may affect when an individual decides to get married and start a family. New graduates who can't get decent jobs may return to their parents' homes instead of establishing their own households. Access to good health care in America was based on the type of employment one had for years, though that may be changing now.

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Unemployment rates for recent college graduates vary depending on several social variables, including their majors and the state of the economy.

10.1 Sociological Perspectives on Social Institutions

As noted in Chapter 5, social institutions are those organized systems that are consistent across time and help to meet the needs associated with social life. They are designed to face the recurring challenges and problems that confront both the individual and society (Gouldner & Gouldner, 1963). These include, but are not limited to, the provision of food and shelter, protection, emotional and psychological support, socialization, and the explanation of puzzling events that are associated with the human experience. Some of the tasks associated with social life would be impossible to accomplish without institutions, while other tasks are greatly simplified because of them (Bierstedt, 1970). The major institutions recognized by sociologists are the family, economy, government, education, religion, and health/health care.

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From a symbolic interactionist perspective, what might be some positive and some negative effects of the institution of religion on society and the individual?

Although we rarely give consideration to the fact, institutions affect the everyday life of each and every individual. These are human groupings that serve to organize and guide human behavior by providing expected ways of thinking and acting. Social institutions include both structural and cultural elements (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). For example, religion provides a variety of statuses, including minister, priest, imam, rabbi, nun, parishioner, believer, and unbeliever. Religion also provides its members with a variety of sophisticated guidelines regarding appropriate and inappropriate behavior, as well as a belief system.

Sociologists generally recognize that there is some degree of interdependency among the various institutions. Different institutions can address similar social needs, and changes and challenges in one institution can have a profound impact on other institutions. For instance, the Great Recession of 2007 is generally considered an economic event. However, it had a profound impact on other institutions. The federal government had to use tremendous resources to stabilize the economy, and this drew resources away from other entities, such as the public education system. Furthermore, the epidemic of unemployment and home foreclosures had enormous negative effects on the institution of the family.

Functionalism asserts that institutions are critical because of the contributions that these structures make to society and to social life. In fact, they are considered so fundamentally important that leading functionalist Talcott Parsons (1951) argued that they are a prerequisite for society. First, institutions provide predictability and stability to social life, thus promoting social order (Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega, & Weitz, 2002). Second, institutions promote social integration by connecting individuals and groups to the larger social system. For example, institutional participation often requires individuals to co-operate with other to achieve some larger goal and possibly even sacrifice for the "common good" (Henslin, 1997). Finally,

institutions serve a socialization function. They teach individuals the skills and attitudes needed for successful participation in social life.

On the other hand, *conflict* theorists argue that institutions are social structures that benefit the elites at the expense of the rest of society. For instance, after the Great Recession of 2007, many financial institutions and other corporations "needed" (and were granted) a huge tax-payer bailout to survive. Ironically, most individual taxpayers (some facing job loss, pay cuts, and home foreclosure) did not receive a "bail out" from the federal government. On the most basic level, institutions can be considered oppressive because of the fundamental fact that these structures regulate human behavior (Brinkerhoff et al., 2002). Furthermore, the elites exploit this tendency to their advantage. Moreover, institutions typically teach and reinforce the dominant ideology of a society, which leads to the acceptance of inequality. For instance, Karl Marx's (1844) main criticism of the institution of religion was that religious ideologies reinforced workers' passivity and encouraged them to accept the exploitation of capitalists.

According to symbolic interactionism, institutions provide individuals and groups with the significant symbols, shared understandings, and meanings that make social life possible. However, the very meanings of institutions are constantly created and recreated (Stryker, 2008). Public sentiments and opinions play a critical role in institutions (Johnson, 1986). For instance, the behavior of American voters can change the direction of the American government, and the U.S. Constitution has been amended on a number of occasions. Moreover, the family consists of a set of individuals, yet members of each family are constantly interpreting and negotiating various roles, rights, and responsibilities (DeGenova, 2008).

However, symbolic interactionism is particularly concerned with the tremendous impact that institutions have on the individual. By participating in institutions, a person develops a sense of what G. H. Mead called the "generalized other," and that person learns to guide their behavior in relation to the expectations of the larger society (Charon, 2010). In addition, a person's identity is shaped by society, and institutions' participation is a critical element in this process (Stryker, 2008). However, the individual is by no means a passive participant in the process. Identities can be negotiated and interpreted, and any individual can place more or less emphasis on some aspects of a role rather than others. For example, a college student can select how much emphasis to place on academics, athletics, dating, extracurricular activities, or partying (Serpe, 1987).

10.2 The Family

Among all of the social institutions, on an individual level, the family is critically important. In a recent survey, Americans were asked to indicate how significant of an element in their lives their families were to them; 76% claimed it was "the most important" and 22% claimed it was "one of the most important" things (Lamanna, Riedmann, & Stewart, 2015). However, there is such a great deal of diversity in family structures and living arrangements among Americans that it is difficult, if not impossible, to talk about one common structure (Vespa, Lewis, & Krieder, 2013). Currently, 44% of American adults (compared to 28% in 1970) are unmarried, and married couples actually now account for less than two thirds of all households (Lamanna et al., 2015).

Some adults choose to never get married, and those who do (the overwhelming majority of the population) are waiting until later than ever to exchange vows. In fact, in 2011, the median ages at first marriage (28.7 years for men and 26.5 for women) were the highest since modern records started in 1890. Effective contraception provides people with the ability to control unplanned pregnancies, and involuntary childlessness is twice the level it was in 1970. One in five American women now exit their childbearing years without having a baby (Cox & Demmitt, 2014). This tendency is more common among women with higher levels of education or who work in professional occupations (Henslin, 1997; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008).

The **family** is a social unit made up of individuals who are associated with one another through marriage, shared ancestry, or adoption. The family is typically characterized by economic cooperation between adults, mutual support among its members, and a shared identity. In the United States, as well as in other countries, there is a tremendous amount of diversity in terms of family structure. A **nuclear family** is generally made up of two parents and their children. An **extended family** comprises parents, children, and additional relatives (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles) who may reside together or live in close geographical proximity. In America, there are increasing numbers of single parent families and **blended families** (those consisting of a couple and their children from prior relationships).

Most individuals hold membership in two distinctly different family units. On the one hand, the family in which a person was born and raised is called the **family of orientation**. On the other hand, the family that a person creates when they have their own children is known as the **family of procreation**.

Marriage

A **marriage** is a socially sanctioned union between two individuals intended to be a long term, if not lifelong, relationship. This typically includes an economic partnership, cooperation in child rearing, companionship, and sexual activity. From a sociological perspective, the term *marriage* has a variety of different meanings (see Schwartz & Scott, 2012). However, first and foremost in contemporary America, it is a legal contract between two individuals that is enforced by the state. There is a long history of legal concerns regarding the practice of marriage. According to anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1930), in traditional male-dominated societies marriage was important for establishing the "legitimacy" of a child based on the status of the father. Currently, every state has a variety of laws that dictate who can marry whom in regards to age, gender, and other social categories.

Marriage also has a profound religious meaning for many Americans. For them, marriage normally includes a religious ritual conducted at a place of worship in front of friends and family. The fact that some people attach strong religious connotations to marriage, while others do not, may explain why there are so many current controversies surrounding marriage in the United States.

For many Americans, marriage is also frequently seen as a source of life satisfaction and personal fulfillment (Elliot & Simmons, 2011). In contemporary society, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on the idea of "romantic love," and the marital relationship is considered the fitting venue for the realization of the expression (Goetting, 1982). However, critics have pointed out that this overemphasis on romantic love, which tends to fade over time, is creating unrealistic expectations of marriage and placing stress on couples.

It has also been argued that the marital experience differs by gender. In her classic book, *The Future of Marriage*, Jessie Bernard (1972) makes the case that wives are in general less satisfied with the marriage relationship than other husbands. She argued that the role of "homemaker" is dysfunctional and impractical, and results in women experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and phobias. On the other hand, she argued that married men have better physical and mental health than their single peers, and they greatly benefit from marriage.

Parenthood

Parenthood is a major event for the entire family unit. For an individual, becoming the parent of a child is the most long-term family commitment that a person can make. Becoming a parent entails a tremendous amount of financial, social, emotional, and time commitments (LaManna et al., 2015). The birth of the first child also has a negative impact on marital satisfaction (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). Ironic as it may seem, however, most Americans report that they are, overall, satisfied with being a parent (Cox & Demmitt, 2014).

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Research has found that the permissive parenting style can lead to behavioral problems in children that often persist through adulthood.

Industrialization has transformed children into consumers. A 2014 report by the USDA indicated that for a middle-income family, it will cost $245,340 to raise a child born in 2013 until age 18 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2014). These expenses include housing, child care, food, and education. However, this estimate does not consider the costs of higher education.

There are a number of different approaches or styles of parenting, and each produces different outcomes for the children (see Lamanna et al., 2015). The first is the authoritarian style, which uses a very high (and rigid) level of parental control with little warmth or nurturance. These parents are rule oriented and often use physical discipline. Permissive parents offer little direction or control and basically let children do as they please. Some permissive parents have a high degree of nurturance, while others are uninvolved emotionally, sometimes to the point of negligence. The authoritative style combines a strong degree of emotional support with personal direction (e.g., a "firm but fair" parent). It is a warm approach that encourages children to develop their own talents and abilities while setting limits and enforcing rules.

Research results have aligned both the authoritarian and permissive styles with negative outcomes. These include depression, behavioral problems, poor school performance, high rates of teen sexuality and pregnancy, and delinquency (Lamanna et al., 2015). The authoritative style of parenting produces the most socially competent and well-functioning children (Cox & Demmitt, 2014). This type of parenting produces the greatest degree of pro-social behavior in kids (DeGenova, 2008).

For most parents, the last child leaving home (often called the "empty nest" stage) is a milestone that signifies the beginning of middle age (Cox & Demmitt, 2014). With couples that are still married, this phase of life typically brings an increased level of marital satisfaction and a renewed intimacy between the partners (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). However, this has been rapidly changing for today's adults who frequently find themselves "sandwiched" between caring for their own children on the one hand and for their elderly parents on the other. Many adult children are still living in their parents' homes. Some have never left, while others are part of the **boomerang phenomenon**—adult children who previously lived independently returning to parental homes. More than half of those aged 18 to 24 still live with parents, while among those aged 25 to 34, 10% of women and 19% of men currently live with their parents (Cox & Demmitt, 2014). Often the reasons for this are economic. This includes the high cost of living, increased education demands, and poor job prospects, which all make it difficult for children to leave home. Moreover, some adult children return to their parents' houses after a divorce. Although this arrangement may have some positive features, parents typically report a high degree of dissatisfaction with this arrangement, due in part to financial strains and lack of privacy (Lamanna et al., 2015). The adult children involved may also be dissatisfied if they see themselves at as a burden or if they have difficulty dealing with parental restrictions (Shepard, 2009).

Many middle-aged adults must also care for or assist in the care of their elderly parents. They may have a parent move into their residence, or, alternately, they may help assist at the elderly person's residence. Currently, over one quarter of households in the United States have someone who is providing care for an adult over the age of 65 (Braunstein, 2013). However, gender plays a primary role in this phenomenon: Women provide 90% of this care (Shepard, 2009). This can be a stressful situation for the caregiver, who is forced to balance conflicting commitments. This situation also increases ethical dilemmas for caregivers who must choose between placing an elderly parent in a nursing home or committing to caring for the parent full-time in their own homes. There can also be serious conflicts among siblings regarding the care of a parent (Cox & Demmitt, 2014).

Single Parent Homes

The single parent home was the fastest growing type of household during the 1990s, and 27% of children now live apart from their fathers (Cox & Demmitt, 2014). In the 1960s, 6% of American kids were raised by a single parent; now more than half of all kids will spend some of their childhood in a single parent home (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). This is not surprising because there is less condemnation of non-marital births today than there was in previous generations. For instance, only about 40% of Americans now think it is "morally wrong" to have a child outside of marriage (Lamanna et al., 2015). The number of births to unwed women in the United States is high. The birth rate to unwed women in the United States is much higher than that in other industrialized nations. Despite stereotypes, the "typical" single mother is a White teenager (Schwartz & Scott, 2012).

There are serious challenges facing female-headed households, and many of the most serious difficulties are economic. Single mothers and their children now account for half of all poor Americans (Cox & Demmitt, 2014), and poverty is more likely to be an enduring phenomenon for female-headed households (DeGenova, 2008). On average, a woman earns less than a man does for doing the same exact work, thus restricting income. Furthermore, many single

mothers do not receive any child support. Only about one half of the women who would be entitled to child support actually have an agreement in place (Lamanna et al., 2015). To further complicate this situation, only about one half of the men who are supposed to pay child support are making full or partial payments (Macionis, 2007).

There are a number of concerns that have been raised regarding negative outcomes that are more likely to be experienced by kids from single parent households (see DeGenova, 2008; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008; Hughes & Kroehler, 2013): they have lower grades and standardized test scores; they are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to attend college; they have higher incidences of psychological and behavior problems and higher rates of substance abuse than do other children; compared to their peers, they have an earlier initiation into sexual activity and are more likely to become teen parents; and finally, kids raised by a single parent report higher rates of juvenile delinquency.

Cohabitation

A leading type of household structure is **cohabitation**, which refers to unmarried adults who are in a romantic relationship sharing common living quarters. The number of Americans who cohabitate has increased greatly over the course of the last two decades. About half of all adults will cohabitate at some time, and about half of all current marriages are preceded by cohabitation (Lamanna et al., 2015). There are a few reasons that account for the increasing popularity of this living arrangement in contemporary America (see Cox & Demmitt, 2014). First, there has been an increasing general acceptance of nontraditional family structures. Second, increased earnings and educational opportunities make it possible for women to not have to feel rushed to get married. Third, younger generations may be more careful than previous generations about entering into risky marriages.

Research has identified several characteristics of adults who are involved in cohabitation (see Lamanna et al., 2015; Vespa et al., 2013). Those who cohabitate have lower average levels of education and income compared to other adults. Second, they have a lower rate of home ownership than their peers do. Last, these individuals had more transitions in living arrangements as children than their peers did, on average. In general, couples who live together before marriage have lower levels of eventual marital satisfaction than other adults (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). However, this finding does not apply if the couple was already engaged prior to the commencement of cohabitation (Lamanna et al., 2015).

However, cohabitating relationships tend to be unstable by their very nature. Most of these arrangements last two years or less (Macionis, 2007). About one half of all non-marital births are to cohabitating women, and about 40% of cohabitating relationships have children under the age of 18 (Lamanna et al., 2015). The instability of these relationships can cause serious problems in housing for the entire family unit. For many couples, the breakup of a cohabitating relationship is as economically damaging as a divorce.

Divorce

The United States has a relatively high divorce rate compared to other industrialized nations, and it is predicted that about one half of all new marriages are destined to end in a divorce.

There was a general upward trend in the divorce rate through the middle of the 20th century. There was a rapid increase in the divorce rate between 1960 and 1980, and a number of specific factors have been cited for contributing to this increase (see Cox & Demmitt, 2014; Goetting, 1982). These included an increased acceptance of divorce, societal emphasis on individualism, gender equality, age at first marriage, and unrealistic expectations of marriage itself.

Rafael Ben-Ari/age fotostock/Thinkstock

The uncoupling process of divorce begins with an "emotional divorce" and ends in a complete "psychic divorce" whereby each individual must establish an identity outside of the former marriage.

From a sociological perspective, divorce is not an event but rather a complicated process that involves "uncoupling" from another human being. In his classic statement on this phenomenon, anthropologist Paul Bohannon (1970) wrote about the "stations of divorce." These are a series of tasks that must be successfully negotiated on the emotional, legal, economic, parental, and community fronts. For instance, this process begins with an "emotional divorce" whereby the person must withdraw emotionally from the failing partnership. This process does not conclude until a person completes a "psychic divorce," or succeeds in establishing an autonomous identity apart from the prior marital relationship.

Although it is not an easy choice, there are a variety of factors that are associated with divorce on the individual level (Lamanna et al., 2015; Macionis, 2007; DeGenova, 2008). First, those who marry at a young age are more likely to divorce. Second, higher levels of education and income are associated with lower divorce rates. Moreover, people who attend religious services on a regular basis are less likely than others to get divorced. Finally, people whose parents divorced are more likely than others to get a divorce themselves.

There are negative consequences associated with divorce for both adults and for children. However, it is important to note that it is often more damaging for all parties involved to stay in a high conflict or dysfunctional family relationship (Lamanna et al., 2015). For adults, there are financial consequences, and these tend to be worse for women (Cox & Demmitt, 2014). Divorced adults have poorer average mental and physical health than their counterparts, and they also have higher rates of substance abuse (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). There are also negative impacts on the children of divorce. These include economic and educational deficits, as well as stress, guilt, anger, shame, despair, and rejection (Schwartz & Knox, 2012).

Blended Families

While the divorce rate in the United States is high, Americans have not given up on marriage. Although men are slightly more likely to do so than women, the overwhelming majority (over 80%) eventually remarries (Elliot & Simmons, 2011). Consequently, the step- or

blended family is an increasingly common arrangement in the United States. According to a 2011 Pew Research Survey, 42% of respondents said that they lived with a "step-relative" (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Step-families face a variety of challenges; blending two different groups of individuals with their unique personalities and lived histories is bound to be difficult. Moreover, the lack of clear guidelines or cultural expectations for step-families can lead to ambiguous role identities and unclear expectations (e.g., which adult is the "disciplinarian") that can cause conflict and confusion in the new family unit (Hines, 1997). Also, there can be significant financial problems due to new obligations plus possible commitments by one or both of the parents to their previous family units (Shepard, 2009). Lastly, step-children can be difficult if not downright confrontational with a new step-parent. This adult may work hard at initiating and building a relationship only to be rejected by the (step)-child and even by the spouse (Brinkerhoff et al., 2002). It is hard for kids to forego ties to their previous families.

For a blended family unit to succeed, a great deal of patience and flexibility is required. Research indicates that overall, step-family relations tend to be more distant and less cohesive than those of a first marriage (Hines, 1997). Younger children normally have an easier time making the transition than do their older siblings, particularly adolescents (DeGenova, 2008). In general, the divorce rate is slightly higher for remarriages than it is for first marriages, although the divorce rate for remarrying adults with no children is similar to the divorce rate of first marriages (Henslin, 1997).

Family Maltreatment

Although the family is supposed to be a source of love, warmth, support, and protection, that is not always the case. Unfortunately, violence, abuse, and other types of mistreatment can and do occur in the context of familial relations. There is a growing body of evidence that suggest this dysfunctional behavior is relatively widespread and has serious consequences. The following discussion is limited to the two most common forms of this phenomenon—intimate partner violence and child maltreatment. However, there are other forms of family maltreatment, such as sibling abuse and abuse of parents by children, that are just now coming to the attention of the general public.

Intimate Partner Violence

Beginning in the 1960s, public attention was finally focused on the terribly neglected problem of domestic violence. This was an important step in acknowledging some serious issues that had been occurring for centuries in the family setting. Various social services were established to help "battered women" and their children. Police agencies also changed their policies to require an automatic arrest in these circumstances.

The use of the term "domestic violence" became more common, but it can be misleading and contribute to misperceiving some of the issues at hand (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). It doesn't always take into account the social context, location of incident, relationship between the parties, and sexual orientation (for example, a gay man who physically assaults his live-in partner during an argument in their parked car in a mall parking lot). **Intimate partner violence** occurs when one partner becomes physically violent or aggressive toward the other. It may

be a relatively isolated incident, or it can be part of a larger pattern of power and control that has been called **intimate terrorism** (see Johnson, 1995).

This is clearly an underreported phenomenon, and many incidents never come to the attention of authorities. Consequently, it is very difficult to try to estimate how common this behavior is. In 2000, the National Institute of Justice found that 22% of the females and 7% of the males reported that a spouse or co-habitant had assaulted them (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). While it appears men are more likely to be the offenders, a few recent studies have revealed that women are more likely than previously thought to use verbal and physical aggression against their intimate partners (DeGenova, 2008; Shepard, 2009). This has created some controversy; because of physical differences, men are much more likely to injure their partners and women are much more likely to have to seek medical treatment for injuries caused by their partners (Henslin, 1997). Moreover, women are also more likely than men to suffer serious psychological harm from this behavior (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000).

A variety of studies have been conducted to identify the causes of this problematic behavior (see Henslin, 1997; DeGenova, 2008; Siegel, 2010). As a result, a number of factors associated with intimate partner violence have been identified. These include:

- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Low income and unemployment
- Low level of education
- Above-average number of children in the household
- Presence of step-child in the household
- The abuser having a history of being abused in childhood
- The abuser having witnessed domestic violence in the household as a child

Child Maltreatment

Another form of family violence is child maltreatment. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014), **child maltreatment** involves any act or acts by a parent or caregiver that results in harm, or potential harm, to a child. This involves situations in which no rational explanation, such as an accident or ordinary discipline, can be found (Siegel, 2010). Maltreatment is a broad category that includes both abuse and neglect (Doerner & Lab, 2011). Abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional. Neglect involves the failure to provide for a child's basic needs, such as food, health care, or proper shelter. It also includes leaving young children unattended in a residence or vehicle. Unfortunately, it is all too common in the United States. In 2007, there were more than 3 million complaints made to CPS agencies, which resulted in 794,000 confirmed cases of abuse and neglect problems (Currie & Widom, 2010).

As one can imagine, this behavior has terrible consequences for its victims. Physical injuries can be devastating and even result in death. A disturbing example is Shaken Baby Syndrome. This involves a traumatic brain injury that occurs when a young child (often an infant) is violently shaken by a caregiver (Stewart et al., 2011). Other adverse consequences of maltreatment include a broad spectrum of psychological, academic, and behavioral problems (Currie & Widom, 2010). These children have higher rates of juvenile delinquency and substance abuse compared to their peers (Siegel & Welsh, 2015).

A number of studies have been conducted in order to try to identify the causes of child mal-treatment (see Doener, 2011; Hughes & Kroehler, 2013; Siegel, 2010). These include:

- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Lower income levels
- Lower levels of education
- Having a large number of children
- The presence of an unrelated adult male in the home
- Single parent homes
- Offender has a personal history of experiencing maltreatment when they were a child

10.3 The Economy

At the most fundamental level, the economy is structured to address basic human needs such as food, shelter, and clothing (Sullivan, 2004). A society must confront some difficult questions regarding what to produce, how to produce it, and how to distribute what is produced. The **economy** is a system designed for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. This economic system includes regulatory norms, values, and an ideology to justify the very existence of the system itself.

Although this topic will be addressed in much greater detail in Chapter 11, social change over the course of two millennia is responsible for the current economic structure in the western world. The earliest societies, which were focused on basic survival, were nomadic hunting and gathering societies. Over time, the mode of food production stabilized through farming and raising livestock, and people were able to settle into communities. This pattern created a relative amount of stability and systems like feudalism developed.

Later, the Industrial Revolution had a transformative impact on western society (Henslin, 1997). First, production was centralized in plants and factories. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of workers and their families relocated to urban areas where the manufacturing jobs were now located. The focus was on mass production, which was standardized on assembly lines that relied on a well-developed division of labor.

However, in recent decades there has been shift to what Daniel Bell (1973) referred to as a *postindustrial society*, meaning that that mode of production has advanced beyond that which was the norm during the industrial age. Currently, most workers don't extract raw materials from the environment, nor do they transform these raw materials into usable products through the manufacturing process. Instead, workers are focused on the production and distribution of services, ideas, and information.

Capitalism

Capitalism is a type of economic system in which the means of production are privately held, and the competitive production of goods is driven by a profit motive. Capitalism is a "demand economy" in which the transactions between producer and consumer dictate what is produced

and how it is produced (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). The market is based on risk, competition, and consumer choice. However, the United States is not a "pure" form of capitalism (i.e., "laissez faire" or "hands off" capitalism). Instead, capitalism operates under governmental regulation with a variety of social services available to the citizens. Some examples include:

- The TARP bailout of certain institutions that were deemed "too big to fail"
- The interstate highway system and many major utilities
- Publically funded primary and secondary education
- Government grants and loans for higher education
- Various anti-trust regulations and actions in the business sector (e.g., the government anti-trust case against Microsoft for maintaining a "monopoly" with its Windows operating system; see Shepard, 2009)
- So-called "corporate welfare" in the form of tax breaks and other government support for certain companies

Capitalism has some pronounced benefits in comparison to other economic systems (Macionis, 2007). First, there is generally a greater amount of prosperity in capitalist economies. Second, in capitalism there is a greater degree of freedom to pursue self-interest. On the other hand, there are some problems or weaknesses with capitalism (Henslin, 1997; Sullivan, 2004). First, there is a greater degree of economic inequality in capitalism relative to other systems. Second, it allows for, and even encourages, greed in economic relations. Finally, it can lead to a situation in which workers can be seriously exploited. These problems will be explored in depth in Chapters 11 and 12.

Socialism

Socialism is an economic system with collective or state ownership of the means of production. The goods are ideally distributed according to human need. It is a "command economy" in which the central government is responsible for the planning of what will be produced and distributed and the exact methods for doing so (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). In fact, wages and prices are often set by the centralized government. However, just like pure capitalism, pure socialism is exceedingly rare (Shepard, 2009). For instance, in China the government gives preferential treatment, such as contracts and subsidies, to selected companies. Even a "capitalist" economy like the United States relies heavily on taxation and social safety net programs (i.e., Medicare, Medicare, Aid for Dependent Children) that are socialist by design—not to mention public education and the U.S. Postal Service, which are funded by tax dollars and not subject to a capitalist open market.

Walter Bibikow/age fotostock/SuperStock

Cuba is organized under socialist principles. How might improved relations with the United States affect Cuba's economy and social structures in the future?

Socialism has two major benefits (Macionis, 2007). First, it provides a greater degree of income equality compared to capitalism. Second, as its goal is to

assure the protection of most in the society, socialism aims to provide citizens with freedom from basic wants. On the other hand, there are some drawbacks to socialism that have been pointed out by critics (Henslin, 1997; Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). First, the economy is in general not as prosperous as capitalism. Second, at times this system many not always be respectful of individual rights. Finally, socialism may curb individual initiative and ingenuity.

The Corporate Economy

Capitalism in contemporary America is no longer dominated by businesses owned by individuals or families; now corporations reign supreme. Although the vast majority of the 20 million businesses in the United States are small and privately owned (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013), the American economy is dominated by a few giant corporations. A **corporation** is a business entity owned by shareholders who have limited control over and limited legal liability regarding this entity. Professional managers direct its day-to-day operations. Many of these corporations have a global or transnational reach.

There are a number of problematic features associated with the growth and dominance of these corporations (Brinkerhoff et al., 2002; Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). First, the executives who run these corporations have few personal interests or long-term financial stakes in the company and tend to focus on short-term profits. Also, the CEOs are paid astronomically relative to the salaries of typical corporate employees. In addition, a certain class of investors, sometimes called "corporate raiders," is making huge profits from buying and selling companies with little regard for the consequences of their actions. Finally, some corporations are criticized for having exceptionally strong ties to the government through lobbyists and Political Action Committees (PACs).

Work as a Social Phenomenon

Sociologists have long recognized that work is a highly significant human activity for a number of reasons. First, work provides individuals and their families with their livelihoods. It places people in the stratification system and it gives them a social position. People with higher status jobs are treated with respect. The opposite is true for people with lower status jobs. Second, people are seen as making a contribution to society through their work (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013). Some jobs (e.g., education, health care, social service) are focused on helping others and improving conditions within society. Third, work provides each of us with a large part of our identities. It influences how we see ourselves and how other people see us. People are often known for the type of work that they do; asking people about their jobs is a common way to "break the ice" and start a conversation (Thompson & Hickey, 2012).

Professions

The **professions** are a special category of highly skilled jobs that require extensive training and education. Examples of professions include medicine, law, academia, and engineering. The professions have several specific characteristics that set them apart from other jobs (see

Gross, 1958). Members of a profession have a strong professional identity and a specialized world view—the practitioner sees it as a "career" rather than a "job." Professions are traditionally focused on service to humanity and society rather than service to self.

The professions are also self-governing. Members have a great degree of freedom and little supervision in the traditional sense. However, professionals oversee each other and control entry into the professions. Their conduct is governed by a professional code of ethics. Finally, professions have authority over clients in the sense that the client comes to the professional for help or guidance and they often place nearly total trust in them (Macionis, 2007).

Alienation

Many observers have suggested that the modern experience of work results in **alienation** for many Americans. Alienation refers to a feeling of helplessness and lack of connection that is experienced by workers who are estranged from the production process and the products of their labor. The modern economy is characterized by a very sophisticated division of labor as well as a high degree of automation. Marx (1874) argued that alienation is a natural product of capitalism itself. Workers lose control over any decision making, as well as the products that they labor to produce. In essence, the worker has become a machine-like object in the production process. Consequently, they are unable to derive any significance from the work that they do.

Marxist theorist Harry Braverman (1974) argues that this alienation has been even further compounded in recent times by automation that has resulted in **deskilling**, or the degradation of skills of the average worker. Computers have further compounded this deskilling (Brinkerhoff et al., 2002). Because of these developments, any given job now takes far less skill to perform than it did prior to these technological innovations. This deskilling impacts more than just manufacturing jobs. For instance, many secretarial skills are now obsolete because of word processing packages. Computer software has also greatly simplified highly complicated mathematical analyses used in bookkeeping and accounting. In sociology, complex statistical analyses that previously took weeks to perform can now be done in a matter of seconds with statistical software. As Ritzer (2013) observed, in the contemporary workplace it is now commonplace for computers and robots to replace human judgment and knowledge.

Sociology in Action: Working Mothers and the Second Shift

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Even though a majority of women now work outside of the home, in most families they remain responsible for most housework and child care as well.

There is a relationship among institutions not only on the societal level, but also on the individual level. One of the best illustrations of this is the relationship between work and family. Working parents find they have to balance commitments to their families with the expectations of their jobs. With recent changes in the American workforce over the last several decades, the vast majority (more than 75%) of mothers with school-age children are now employed outside of the home. For her influential book, *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hochschild (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) studied approximately 50 couples in which both were employed outside of the home. This project involved extensive interviews and observations conducted over a period of several years.

Her findings were compelling. She found that women who worked outside of the home still completed the vast majority of the domestic labor—cooking; cleaning up after meals; doing laundry; physical care for children such as bathing, dressing, and feeding; cleaning bathrooms; helping kids with homework; preparing materials for children's extracurricular activities; and transporting children. This domestic work is unpaid labor that needs to be done after a full day of labor at a job. In general, the husbands appeared to be comfortable with this situation; they generally considered household labor to be the "wives' work."

Some men did, in fact, pitch in, but they tended to help with "fun and leisure" type tasks, like playing with kids, rather than the scheduled and necessary tasks. As a result of this unequal distribution of household labor, working women were tired, drained, and sometimes resentful. They were also experiencing high level of stress, tension, and guilt.

More than 25 years after Hochschild's work, are gender roles changing in the home? The American Time Use Survey, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014a), surveyed people between 2009 and 2013 (interviewing 11,400 Americans in 2013 alone; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014b). They found that on an average day, full-time working men worked .6 hours longer than full-time working women, which is important information for this discussion. However, only 19% of men did housework (such as cleaning or doing laundry) compared to 49% of women; only 42% of men prepared food or cleaned it up, compared to 68% of women. On an average day in households with children under age 6, men spent 26 minutes providing physical care to a child (such as bathing or feeding), while women spent 1 hour (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a, paras. 4, 12, 20). It appears that women still perform more of the household cleaning and child care tasks than men do, even when they work full-time, and men spend more time in leisure (including watching television) and exercise activities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a, paras. 13–15).

As you compare these data, consider that Hochschild's study involved observations of households; the recent survey data was compiled via telephone interviews with Americans keeping one-day, self-recorded diaries of their time use. How might these differing methodologies affect the data and conclusions?

10.4 Education

Education is the institutionalized process of formally transmitting knowledge, attitudes, and skills through systematic instruction. It also teaches young people the norms regarding behavior and values that are considered important, such as patriotism. The first public school in America was established in 1634, and by 1918 education was mandatory in all states (Macionis, 2007). For progressives, mandatory education was a reaction to the problem of child labor in the industrial revolution. For conservatives, it was part of a larger effort to assimilate immigrants (Collins, 2011).

In the broadest sense, the American education system is based on the ideology of meritocracy (much like our economic system, as noted in Chapter 7). This means that the "best and the brightest" should rise to the top in the system. Education is supposed to "sort" young people by ability and skill, and "funnel" them into various jobs and statuses. Ideally, education is the "great equalizer" and a path to upward mobility. At times, this is the case. However, social variables like race and class play a role in the process, and inequality can have a detrimental impact on the educational experience of millions of young Americans.

Tracking

A major part of the "sorting" function of education involves the classification, and consequently the labeling, of students on the basis of behavior and alleged ability. This starts as soon as children enter the school system. Gracey (1972) characterized kindergarten in America as an academic "boot camp." The primary goal of that initial year is to teach pupils the academic routine and the "student role." During this experience, conformity is expected and spontaneity and creativity controlled (if not discouraged). Students who conform to the school-imposed rules are called "good kids," while those who don't may be classified as "trouble makers" or "problems."

Based in large part on very early assessments, students are tracked—placed with other pupils thought to have the same abilities—into groups. This process of **tracking** typically leads to the labeling of students as "smart," "dumb," "gifted," "average," and "learning disabled." This tracking has long-term (if not lifelong) consequences. As they progress through the various grade levels, some students are placed in college preparatory tracks, while others are placed in vocational tracks. Evidence reveals that tracking is not blind to class and race/ethnicity: poor and minority children are far more likely to be placed in the lower tracks (Shepard, 2009).
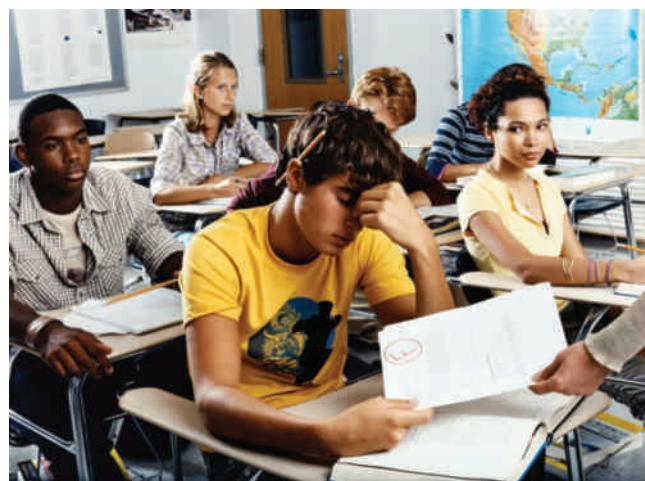
Digital Vision/Thinkstock

When students are labeled as having low academic ability, teachers tend to lower their expectations of those students.

The dynamics of tracking in the school system help to create self-fulfilling prophecies. The teachers expect the "smart" and "advanced" students to do well, and research suggests that they teach these kids differently (Hickey & Thompson, 2012). On the other hand, "low ability" students prompt lower expectations, are given less work, and are held to less rigorous standards. Research has also discovered that guidance counselors feel an ethical obligation to steer students in the direction of jobs that they feel are consistent with their abilities (Shepard, 2009). They are likely to inquire about any potential "problems" when "good" students are performing poorly, but fail to do so when "weak" students perform poorly. It is no surprise that students perceive and realize these differential expectations—they tend to perform academically how they believe they are expected to perform.

Two social psychologists, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), conducted a study in a California elementary school that illustrated the impact of teacher expectations on student performance no matter the dubious sources of those expectations. They randomly selected about 20% of the students and falsely indicated that a previous IQ test suggested these kids were "late bloomers" who were poised to make remarkable gains in the coming year. As predicted, the "late bloomers" performed better than other students that year, probably in large part due to the teacher expectations regarding the "late bloomers."

Social Capital

Social class may impact students' experiences and outcomes in the educational system by means of the social capital possessed by the students and their families. **Social capital** is an intangible phenomenon consisting of the actual and potential resources a person can draw from their "network." It involves the degree to which people are connected to the larger social system. Like any other type of capital, social capital provides people with the resources, information, and paths for advancement (Fasang, Mangino, & Brückner, 2010).

Bourdieu (1977) argued that children from middle- and upper-class backgrounds have a greater amount of social capital and are therefore more successful in school. These kids adjust more easily and are more likely to be familiar with the cultural arrangements and social expectations of the school system. Moreover, they are more likely to have extensive educational resources, such as technology and books in their homes (Perry & Perry, 2003). Lareau (1987) found that regardless of their social class, parents generally want their kids to succeed when they enter the schools. However, parents from middle- and upper-class families are better equipped to interact with the teachers and make a meaningful connection to the school system. They frequently have similar characteristics as school personnel and can identify with them more easily (and vice versa).

This social capital is so important in education that it serves to reproduce social inequalities within the school system (Bourdieu, 1977). Children from higher status families succeed in school. In turn, they become higher status adults. On the other hand, kids from lower status families tend not to thrive in the educational system. They tend to remain in a lower social status when they reach adulthood.

Disparities in School Funding

In the influential book *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol (1991) painted a bleak picture of the differences between less affluent school districts and their more affluent peers. These less affluent schools tend to have a higher percentage of poor and minority students. Because school funding is often based on property taxes, the wealthier areas (often in suburbia) have more funds to spend on educating the children of that community. Wealthy districts spend as much as three times more per student as the poor school districts. The more affluent districts have better resources, including buildings, classrooms, textbooks, and instructional equipment.

A major difference between well-to-do and poor school districts involves the quality of teachers and the compensation that those teachers receive. Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2012) conducted an analysis in which they discovered that when you control for cost of living, there is a 3:1 ratio in teacher compensation (i.e., salaries and benefits) between the higher- and lower-spending districts. The lower-spending districts tend to have higher teacher turnover, less desirable working conditions, and often have to hire less qualified teachers. Districts serving the highest percentage of minority students (generally the poorest districts) have the highest percentage of uncredentialed and inexperienced teachers.

Performance/Outcomes

There is a great deal of concern about disparities in educational performance based on race and ethnicity. A large number of studies have found that Whites and Asian Americans generally perform substantially better academically than students from Native American, Hispanic, and African American backgrounds (Gregory, Skiba, & Moguera, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics recently released a report called *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups* (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Ramani, 2010), which highlighted the educational challenges and progress of American students based on race and ethnicity. Some of the key findings include:

- Among eighth-grade students, Asian Americans and White students are about twice as likely as African American and Hispanics to be classified as "proficient or above" in terms of reading. A similar pattern exists for reading in the 12th grade.
- Among eighth-grade students, Whites and Asian Americans were twice as likely as Hispanic and African American students to be "at or above proficient" in terms of math skills.
- In grade 12, Asian American and White students were three times more likely than students from other racial/ethnic groups to be "at or above proficient" in terms of math.
- In terms of SAT scores (for both math and reading), Whites and Asian Americans did substantially better (at least 40 points on average) than did Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans.

One last adverse educational outcome is dropping out of high school. High school dropouts are twice as likely as graduates to be unemployed (Aud et al., 2010). This sets the dropout on a path to lifelong poverty. As indicated in Table 10.2, there are distinct disparities in the dropout rate based on race and ethnicity. African Americans are almost two times more likely than Whites to drop out of high school. Hispanics have a dropout rate that is almost triple that of White students.

Table 10.2: Dropout rate by race/ethnicity 2012

All Races*	6.6%
White	4.3%
African American	7.5%
Hispanic	12.7%

*Includes races not otherwise noted

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics—United States Department of Education.

A great deal of discussion (and criticism) has focused on the perceived problems in educational performance of American children compared to other nations. Critics have pointed out that we lag behind many other industrialized nations in educational performance (see Bennett, 1994). However, a more recent analysis by Dalton (2011) discovered that both race and ethnicity play a role in test performance, and consequently bias these comparisons. On the one hand, Whites and Asian Americans perform at or near the top of international ratings. On the other hand, Hispanics and African Americans perform at or close to the bottom of these ratings. Since the United States has a greater percentage of minorities than any other industrialized nation, this disproportionately biases the international comparisons.

Higher Education

After World War II, the GI Bill was in large part responsible for increasing both access to and demand for higher education. At that time, the majority of jobs didn't require advanced education training. However, the rapid technological innovations in subsequent decades created the need for advanced training (Perry & Perry, 2003). No country has a higher percentage of adults with a college degree than the United States (Macionis, 2009). In 2008, over three million college degrees were awarded in this country (Aud et al., 2010). It is estimated that 80% of high school graduates now enroll in some form of post-secondary education (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011).

Ideally, higher education is a gateway to social mobility. Having a college degree adds an estimated $1 million to lifetime income (Macionis, 2009). A degree is usually required for the higher paying and more prestigious jobs in our society. Between 1975 and 2000, the adjusted median income for college degree holders increased, but the adjusted median income for high school degree holders declined over the same period (Kelly, 2005). However, there is generally an even greater advantage to attending the most highly selective or elite schools (Davies & Guppy, 1997). Graduates of these institutions normally excel in terms of income and occupational status. For instance, a disproportionate number of Fortune 500 CEOs attended the most prestigious colleges and universities (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011).

For working- and lower-class students, higher education is an unavoidable passageway into the middle class (Stevens, Armstrong, & Arum, 2008). Although college is a means of social mobility for some, for many others it reproduces inequality. Haveman and Smeeding (2006) and Julian (2012) documented some of the important class differences in higher education:

Cheryl Zibisky/Getty Images

Although higher education enables social mobility for some, the majority of students at "elite" schools still come from families with higher incomes and social classes.

- In terms of the top-tier or most selective schools, nearly three quarters of the students are from the upper-income quartile
- Only 3% of the students in the most selective schools are from the lowest income quartile
- Only 10% of the students in the lowest income quartile actually graduate, regardless of how selective or elite the school they attend is

As Bourdieu's (1977) work suggested, social status is an important variable in getting into and succeeding in college. For instance, higher-class students and their families are more comfortable with the college selection, application, and admissions process. Higher-class students are better equipped with the information and skills they will need to successfully navigate the higher education system. They are better able to connect with faculty, fellow students, and extracurricular activities that will benefit them in the long run (Stevens, Armstrong, & Arum, 2008). They are also better suited to select the more lucrative programs of study. On the other hand, the expenses associated with higher education often force lower- and working-class students to work extensive hours to subsidize their studies.

There are also racial disparities in higher education. The students at the most elite schools are disproportionally White (Karen, 2002). Overall, minorities student are less likely to even enroll in post-secondary education. Once enrolled, Hispanic and African American students have lower rates than Asian American and White students of staying in college and completing the degree (Kelly, 2005). One factor contributing to these disparities is the lower-quality secondary schools in poor areas, which are predominantly attended by minority students

(Haveman & Smeeling, 2000). These handicap students, not only in terms of standardized test scores, but also in their lack of familiarity with the college selection and admissions process. In addition, most campuses lack a "critical mass" of minority students and faculty who can serve as role models, provide a welcoming environment, and provide the support that lower-income students may need in order to adjust to the new environment (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013).

The education system in general, and higher education in particular, has been criticized as being a "gatekeeper" that is contributing to the problem of credentialism. As noted in Chapter 7, this term describes a situation in which degrees, diplomas, and certificates govern who is qualified or eligible for a job (Collins, 1979). These credentials are meant to suggest a certain "pedigree" and are often needed to gain entry to certain occupation. Individuals are required to have a specific credential regardless of how relevant it may or may not be (Perry & Perry, 2003).

There are several problems with credentialing in higher education. First, getting the most "elite" credentials is highly correlated with social class (Brinkerhoff et al., 2002). In turn, those highly credentialed occupations tend to be higher paying and higher prestige compared to other jobs. However, it is primarily only members of the higher social classes who can afford to support their children with the education that gives them access to these most elite credentials (Collins, 1979). Second, credentials, as opposed to merit, are determining job placement. These credentials do not necessarily provide, nor do they ensure, the needed work skills. Many of the most successful entrepreneurs, such as Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Ted Turner, and Mark Zuckerberg, were college dropouts. Third, this phenomenon encourages the existence of false and essentially meaningless credentials (Ritzer, 2013). For instance, a study by the General Accounting Office found that nearly 500 federal employees had meaningless degrees from "diploma mills" that sell dubious credentials for a price (Johnson, 2006). Moreover, some people simply falsify their credentials. Finally, due to the proliferation of degrees and certifications, there are now concerns about credential inflation, meaning that any given credential is now decreasing in value. In the 1950s, only a small fraction of the population had a college degree. Now, more than one fifth of the U.S. population has one (Collins, 2011). So instead of increasing in value or relevance, the college degree may actually be decreasing in those aspects, at the same time that it is required for almost any career.

Summary and Resources

Chapter Summary

Social institutions are organized systems that seek to meet the various needs associated with social life. The major institutions recognized by sociologists are family, economy, education, government, religion, and health/health care. These structures do not exist independently; institutions have some degree of interdependence.

The first institution covered in this chapter is the family. This is a highly complex phenomenon that encompasses a variety of life changes, including marriage, parenthood, and for some, divorce. This is an increasingly diverse (and sometimes problematic) institution in contemporary America.

The second institution discussed, the economy, is designed for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods. Economic systems vary from capitalism to socialism. In contemporary global society, corporations are playing an increasingly prominent role in the economy.

The final institution presented in this chapter was education. Both social capital and the practice of tracking have important implications for students. Despite the notion that education is the "great equalizer," there are disparities in educational funding that can translate into regrettable disparities in educational outcomes.

Web Resources

The American Enterprise Institute on Education

http://www.aei.org/policy/education/

The AEI is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that focuses on areas of public policy relating to a variety of areas including defense, economy, education, health, energy and the environment. This is the homepage of the AEI research division dedicated to education.

The National Center for Educational Statistics

http://nces.ed.gov/

A part of the U.S. Department of Education, the NCES is the main government agency for collecting and analyzing data related to education.

Economic Sociology

http://www.asanet.org/sectionecon/econ.cfm

Section of the American Sociological Association that focuses on the "sociological study of the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of scarce goods and services."

Discussion Questions

1. What is an institution? How are institutions "interrelated"? Provide an example of an interrelationship between two institutions.
2. Out of the three basic sociological perspectives (functionalism, conflict, and symbolic interaction) which one do you believe is most useful for understanding institutions? Why?
3. In recent decades there have been a variety of changes in the American family (e.g., divorce rate, single parent homes, cohabitation, and blended families). In general, are these changes positive or negative? Provide a justification for your answer.
4. The two main types of economic systems discussed in this chapter were capitalism and socialism. Which one do you think is most beneficial for the individual? For society?
5. A major challenge facing the institution of education is unequal outcomes for various social groupings. In your opinion, what can be done to address this problem?

Key Terms

alienation A feeling of indifference and lack of connection experienced by workers who are distanced from the production process and the products of their labor.

blended family A family unit made up of an adult couple and their children from previous relationships.

boomerang phenomenon Adult children who previously lived independently returning to reside in their parental homes (on a large scale).

capitalism Type of economic system in which the means of production are privately held and the competitive production of good is driven by a profit motive.

child maltreatment Any act or acts by a parent or caregiver that results in harm, or potential harm, to a child.

cohabitation Unmarried adults who are in a romantic relationship sharing common living quarters.

corporation A business entity owned by shareholders who have limited control over and legal liability regarding this entity.

deskilling The degradation of skills of the average worker, which is caused in large part by technological innovations.

economy A system designed for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

education The institutionalized process of formally transmitting knowledge, attitudes, and skills through systematic instruction.

extended family A family unit comprised of parents, children, and additional relatives who sometimes reside together or live in close geographical proximity.

family A social unit made up of individuals who are associated with one another through marriage, shared ancestry, or adoption.

family of orientation The family unit in which a person was born and raised.

family of procreation The family unit a person creates when they have their own children.

intimate partner violence Occurs when one partner becomes physically violent or aggressive toward the other.

intimate terrorism A form of partner violence that is part of a larger pattern of power and control.

marriage A socially sanctioned union between two individuals intended to be a long-term, if not lifelong, relationship.

nuclear family A family unit made up of parents and their children.

profession A special type of highly skilled job that require extensive training and education.

social capital The actual and potential resources a person can draw from in their "network" as a result of their connection to the larger social system.

socialism An economic system with collective or state ownership of the means of production. The goods are ideally distributed according to human need. The central government is responsible for the planning of what will be produced and distributed.

tracking The practice of placing students believed to have the same abilities in the same educational groups.